



CSCanada

Studies in Literature and Language

Vol. 10, No. 4, 2015, pp. 82-88

DOI:10.3968/6833

ISSN 1923-1555[Print]

ISSN 1923-1563[Online]

www.cscanada.netwww.cscanada.org

The Coexistence of Good and Evil: Exploitation of Human Nature in *The Call of the Wild*

ZHOU Tiannan^{[a],*}; YAO Xiaojuan^[a]^[a]School of Foreign Languages, Northeast Petroleum University, Daqing, Heilongjiang, China.

* Corresponding author.

Supported by “The Study on Collective Unconsciousness in the Western and Chinese Wolf Literature” (No. 2013QN216). The research is one of the research results of The Youth Science Fund Research Program sponsored by Northeast Petroleum University, Heilongjiang, China.

Received 15 December 2014; accepted 6 April 2014

Published online 25 April 2014

Abstract

Jack London, one of the great American writers, is not a writer just good at animal novels as some critics assumed. Human nature is embodied from all angles in the story of the animal. Influenced by Zola and Darwin, London tries to illustrate the darwinism and socialism in the novel. Therefore, it is more objective when we interpret the optimistic and fatalistic, active and reclusive human nature that Jack London believed from the naturalism point of view.

Key words: Human nature; The Call of the Wild; naturalism; Jack London

Zhou, T. N., Yao, X. J. (2015). The Coexistence of Good and Evil: Exploitation of Human Nature in *The Call of the Wild*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 10(4), 82-88. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/6833> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/6833>

INTRODUCTION

I went about amongst the men who sat in the high places.... Where they were not alive with rottenness, quick with unclean life, they were merely the unburied dead—clean and noble, like well-preserved mummies, but not alive. Then there was a great, hopeless mass, neither noble nor alive, but merely clean. It did not sin positively nor deliberately; but it did sin passively and ignorantly by acquiescing in the current immorality and

profiting thereby (Etulain, 1979, pp.143-144).

From a “working beast” to “a pillar of society”, London had seen numerous people. In his article “What Life Means to Me”, he specified two kinds of people “men who were noble and clean but not alive”, and “men who were alive but neither clean nor noble” and expressed his weariness and disappointment to the former and his sympathy and applause to the latter, whom he regarded as industrious, alive, and filled with human nature whether they did sin or not. In his viewpoint, he appreciated the beautiful, kind and even cruel things in life rather than the rigid and false value in the traditional Christian ethics. “For London, environment is the determining factor in human action. Man is an animal and is at the mercy of biological determinism” (Lundquist, 1987, p.142). Therefore, in *The Call of the Wild*, he vividly described the evil and kind characters under the influence of their different chance and heredity through savage conflicts and emotional collisions between people and dogs in the severe environment.

1. THE REVELATION OF HUMAN'S BADNESS

The naturalists believe that the specific environment can not only reveal people's courage, wisdom and perseverance, but uncover people's disguise and show their evil nature. London had been through the cellar of society and forced to see “hereditary inefficients, degenerates, wrecks, lunatics, addled intelligences, epileptics, monsters, weaklings, in short, a very nightmare of humanity” (ibid, p.30), therefore, he believed that races that lived in poor environments were inferior races.

After reading evolutionary theory, London believed that character and even “racial memory” were inherited, which helped explain congenital inferiority of certain races. That is to say, besides the environment, factors leading to the degradation of these inferior races are the inheritance of acquired characteristics. At the same

time, although London believed firmly in Anglo-Saxon supremacy and regarded his race as embodying the nobles qualities, London admitted Anglo-Saxons' cruelty and exploitation of inferior peoples, "Our lusts and violences and all the evil things we have done there is a certain integrity, a sternness of conscience, a melancholy responsibility of life, a sympathy and comradeship and warm human feel" (ibid, p.47). So, in *The Call of the Wild*, we can see London's reflection on people's bad characters from all the aspects.

1.1 Selfishness—Gardener's Betrayal

London was in the pit and saw the naked transaction—men can sold everything to get food and shelter because all things were goods. "The merchant sold shoes, the politician sold his manhood...while nearly all sold their honor" (London, 1964, p.395). In his eyes, all people bought and sold, and consequently we can see a buying and selling scene in the novel.

During the gold rush, London truly kept an account of the dog-centered world in the Yukon. First of all, in order to travel on the vast subarctic plains, dogsled was the only viable means of navigating. As a result, across this frozen land dogs, the most valuable commodities in the Yukon, were the only means of carrying hundreds of pounds of supplies. It was their value that prompted a dishonest business in the buying and stealing of dogs to be shipped to the Yukon.

Manuel, a gardener down in the subterranean depths of misery, whose ancestry was so humble that both the society and London chose to ignore, got addicted to gambling and believed in a system, a besetting weakness. When he lost all his money and ran out on his debts, he regained consciousness and remembered he had a big family to support. With a low wages in this tooth-and-nail society, Manuel was helpless and inability in the face of poverty, which led him to the original sin—stealing owner's dog.

Buck, a "working class", who had always lived a peaceful and comfortable life in Judge Miller's family, encountered a Judases, a traitor desperate for money. While the judge left home for a meeting, Buck's trust in man enabled Manuel to betray him by luring him away from the judge's house and attaching a rope to his collar. However, this romantic picture is undermined by Manuel's tricks against Buck to prove others his dog's unthinking devotion to him. Although it seems that it was economic law, natural forces and a damned chance that determined the destiny of both men and Buck, obviously people's selfishness and ruthlessness hurt Buck's precious trust in men when Buck was sold as a commodity not people's friend many a time.

1.2 Inhumanity — the "Club Policy" of the Man to the Animals

After the gold rush began, it's due to man's cruelty and irresponsibility that the Yukon Territory were littered with the bones of horses and dogs that had been driven mercilessly in man's greedy scramble for gold. In the end of the novel,

Buck's decision to join nature becomes reasonable in view of the history of the area because the merciless nature is not as cruel as man's attempts to conquer it.

Now, let's witness Buck's nightmare with men. First of all, we should know man's inner desire. Nietzsche had a similar line of thought, but for him all human behavior could be reduced to a single basic drive, the will to power. "Man wants to perfect himself, to become a creator rather than a mere creature. Most fail in this pursuit and choose to seek crude, abusive power over others as a substitute" (Lundquist, 1987, p.120). For the latter, "life is without worth or meaning; human beings are reduced to things, whether niggers or cockroaches; brutality and killing have become a game" (Labor, 1994, p.89). Then we should admit that owing to his special kind of intelligence and physique, man can use with greater facility than other animals certain tools—the chain, the whip, the gun, and especially in *The Call of the Wild*, the club—to secure his mastery over the dog.

Until he is kidnapped, Buck lives the life of a sated aristocrat on Judge Miller's estate. Although Buck is a valuable commodity, after his kidnapping he is subject to extreme cruelty and neglect, in the course of his move to and through the Yukon. The first instance occurs when the first dog dealer twists the rope attached to his collar:

Then the rope tightened mercilessly, while Buck struggled in a fury, his tongue lolling out of his mouth and his great chest panting futilely....But his strength ebbed,...and the two men threw him into the baggage car. (London, 2009, p.5)

For many days he is constantly tormented and has nothing to drink or eat: "the ill treatment had flung him into a fever, which was fed by the inflammation of his parched and swollen throat and tongue" (ibid, p.7). Then he is attacked by a man in red who holds a club. When Buck jumped to challenge the ill-treatment, the club smashed him down.

After a particularly fierce blow, he crawled to his feet, too dazed to rush.... Then the man advanced and deliberately dealt him a frightful blow on the nose. All the pain he had endured was as nothing compared with the exquisite agony of this. (ibid, p.9)

After falling into the clutches of Charles and Hal, the dogs suffer a lot. They are consistently overworked in a frightful hunger. They are required to pull heavy loads which are beyond their abilities. Therefore, Dub, a poor dog, sprains his shoulder and is shot by the master without hesitation. Then the food runs out and the dogs are faced with starvation, and at last they fall down one by one:

And through it all Buck staggered along at the head of the team as in a nightmare. He pulled when he could; when he could no longer pull, he fell down and remained down till blows from whip or club drove him to his feet again. (ibid, p.55)

Finally, Hal, the cruel master, is nearly killing Buck:

And as they continued to fall upon him, the spark of life within flickered and went down....He no longer felt anything, though very faintly he could hear the impact of the club upon his body. (ibid, p.58)

There are also other dogs' sufferings we should mention. For instance, the viciousness of these semiwild dogs may well be due to constant ill-treatment, hunger and the lash. Man is not alone in inflicting cruelty in the novel. Nature itself, including the dogs, is also shown as intensely cruel. But man must assume the greater blame because of his power over other animals—a power that he abuses.

1.3 Greed—Crazy Gold Diggers

What causes man's cruelty to animals? The overwhelming force given in *The Call of the Wild* is greed. Gardener's greed for money to repay his debts, the dog dealers' greed for huge profits from the urgent need of the sled dogs, Perrault and Francois's greed for the reputation by driving the sled team to break the record, and the three incompetents' greed for gold all prove to be man's extreme avarice. It's greed that leads men to beat, starve, whip, and overwork the dogs belonging to them.

Then let's see the last and most frenzied international gold rushes, the sea of greedy desire. In 1896, a group of lucky pioneers in the Klondike discovered the richest gold mine in the world. The effect of this event was dramatic and immediate. Just like Chaplin's "The Gold Rush," this discovery quickly spread and drew a crowd of people to the frozen north. Although the circumstance in the Klondike is severe, people still rushed to there at the risks of their lives. The situation at that time was in a mess: The state had only joined the Union in 1846, and "its population of less than twenty thousand had increased fifteen times in the next thirty years. The Chief motive of this speedy immigration had been the greed which is called opportunity" (Sinclair, 1978, Foreword xiv).

London clarified his hatred for the "business-minded" crowd, "I discovered that their intellect, in the business sense, was abnormally developed. Also, I discovered that their morality, where business was concerned, was nil" (London, 1964, p.398). Buck noticed those people and felt worried about his own fate too. "Buck not only learns how to defer to men but he also observes the money transactions between unknown men and the man in the red sweater" (Rossetti, 2006, p.49).

Now and again men came...money passed between them the strangers took one or more of the dogs away with them. Buck wondered where they went, for they never came back; but the fear of the future was strong upon him, and he was glad each time when he was not selected. (London, 2009, p.10)

Actually, the dogs, Buck included, like the humans he saw, are forced to serve human greed. The Klondike gold is part and parcel of capitalism, the system that suppressed the English poor. The desire for money in both cases leads strong creatures to enslave weaker ones. "It is the rage for gold that leads to Buck's kidnapping, clubbings, starvation, and killing labor and to the deaths of other dogs" (Johnston, 2007, p.11). It is the abuses that derive from such materialism gone mad that lead Buck to abandon human society.

1.4 Ignorance—Incompetent Masters

In the search for gold, ignorance produces the greatest suffering for those forcibly enlisted such as shorthaired dogs foolishly taken to the Yukon, almost invariably froze to death, whether it is in a London factory or on a Klondike sled team. They had invaded a hostile land where nature was cold, impassive, awesome; humans puny and insignificant and the ruling law was "survival of the fittest" and "where the key to survival was adaptability, but this did not simply mean physical fitness or brute strength" (Labor, 1994, p.25), and an agile mind coupled with adequate experience is also indispensable.

It was people's incompetence and ignorance that resulted in some of the cruelty to animals, which partially accounted for the behavior of some people in *The Call of the Wild*. Therefore, we should lay blame for the loss of so many animals not just on the terrain, but on the general ignorance and stupidity of their owners—people on whom London seems to have patterned Mercedes, Charles, and Hal, the bungling newcomers, who are "self-indulgent, ignorant, greedy, and hypocritical and have no respect for the dogs and are made to stand for the worst of the dolts" (Tavernier-Courbin, 1995, p.240). Although London didn't specify their ancestry, he chose the typical naturalistic types: Charles and Hal are characters of strong animal drives and small intellectual activity, and Mercedes is excited, neurotic temperament, at the mercy of moods, and doesn't want to analyze, either. For instance, they overloaded the sled, even allowing Mercedes to add her weight to the load regardless of dogs' tiredness, took more dogs than they could feed, and traveled over melting ice.

Knowing how to pack is the most important thing for the trip to the Klondike, which becomes a major topic in the novel when Mercedes, Hal, and Charles, the three incompetents, come into the sight of readers. Because the dogs cannot move the overpacked sled, many superfluous supplies such as blankets and clothes have to be dumped inexorably. In addition, Mercedes's willful helplessness not only puts a heavy burden on the dogs but shows her indifference to real workers' dilemma. The narrator notes that "because she was sore and tired, she persisted in riding on the sled...a lusty last straw to the load dragged by the weak and starving animals" (London, 2009, p.55).

Indeed, most of the dogs starve before the three-member family disappears beneath the ice. In reality, "starvation in the Yukon led many men to eat their dogs or any available leather goods, including their shoes and the traces for the dog-sled" (Johnston, 2007, p.104). With so many unexpected people, many of whom had not packed adequate food or had lost it along the way, all food became very scarce. The theme of starvation appears in *The Call of the Wild* when the family party makes the mistake of taking along too many dogs and not enough food to feed them. Regardless of their own incompetence, they beat and starve the dogs cruelly. London ironically notes that "it was a simple matter to give the dogs less food....Not only did

they not know how to work the dogs, but they did not know how to work themselves” (London, 2009, p.53).

Eventually, Hal and Charles drive the starving dogs into the Five Fingers area, “which is the largest nonpolar ice field in North America. This area is covered by permafrost—constantly frozen ground just beneath the surface layer” (Johnston, 2007, p.97). This presents terrible problems resulting from instability “when construction or sudden rises in temperature thaw the permafrost temporarily. At such times, buildings and modes of transportation end up sinking into water” (ibid). A similar problem, mentioned in *The Call of the Wild*, occurs when the ice beneath the snow melts. Despite the advice they have received to “lay over” until they can more easily see what they are doing in the spring thaw, they drive across the rotten ice covering the lake and whole dog teams vanish into freezing water.

This is stupidity and greed combined, “the dual theme of unbridled capitalism” (ibid, p.82). It leads to the misuse, starvation, and death of the dogs and eventually to the death of the three people as well. This is the theme of naturalistic tragedy: The unfit—the morally weak, the selfish, the foolhardy usually die a useless and shameful death after having lived without dignity, such as the three miserable incompetents who are neither “toil hard, suffer sore, nor remain sweet of speech and kindly” (London, 2009, p.54), and “who embody the antithesis of what man should be in the northern wilderness” (Tavernier-Courbin, 1995, p.249).

2. THE INTERPRETATION OF HUMAN'S KINDNESS

The science of eugenics was part of fashionable biology at the turn of the century, and it was one of London's major interests. “London even wrote a letter to the *Medical Review of Reviews* in 1910 expressing his belief that the human future should be determined by the practice of selective breeding” (Lundquist, 1987, p.97). This notion not only is an example of London's obsession with Anglo-Saxon racial superiority, but reveals human's behavior in his thought and fiction. Because he firmly believes that “up above him, were unselfishnesses of the spirit, clean and noble thinking, keen intellectual living” (London, 1964, p.392). He firmly believes in the excellence of the human nature. And he believes that “spiritual sweetness and unselfishness will conquer the gross gluttony of today” (ibid, p.399).

London respected for the men who could actually thrive in a severe environment. London's Northland heroes were a ruggedly independent yet a remarkably compassionate breed “who paid allegiance only to the inexorable laws of nature and to the authority of conscience” (Labor, 1994, p.25). He began to see them as emblematic figures who had somehow developed a code of behavior that would enable them to endure

life at the very limits of existence. In fact, this code of behavior, in his novel, is virtues such as courage, integrity, and brotherhood. “Men who can survive must change both physically and morally, as only the strong survive; but they must change for the better morally as well as physically” (Tavernier-Courbin, 1995, p.249).

2.1 Integrity—Francois's Fairness

Buck is sold to Francois and Perrault, two couriers worked for the Canadian government, whose job is to deliver dispatches about the information of the gold rush. As a consequence, Buck is forced to be a sled dog, an industrious labor, by his first owners.

London didn't just mention Buck's new masters quickly like the above people, who were evil and did some insignificant or ignoble job, instead he recorded in detail about their ancestry and appearance, “Perrault was a French-Canadian, and swarthy; but Francois was a French-Canadian half-breed giant, and twice as swarthy” (London, 2009, p.11). Judging from their ancestry, we can sense London's racial favor—the white pioneers who own excellent heredity and show physical fitness and suntanned skin color due to the industrious and tough outdoor lives especially in a severe circumstance.

In Buck's viewpoint, the two new masters were different to the Judge and many more people he met before. Although he couldn't develop a sense of love for them quickly, he honestly respected them from the bottom of heart in that he quickly found that “Perrault and Francois were fair men, calm and impartial in administering justice, and too wise in the way of dogs to be fooled by dogs” (ibid). The examples are as follows:

In the deck of the Narwhal, Buck met a big, snow-white dog called Spitz, a fellow who “was friendly, in a treacherous sort of way, smiling into one's face the while he meditated some underhand trick” (ibid). Once, when they had their first meal, grinning cheekily, Spitz stole Buck's meat. Buck was so angry that he was ready to spring to fight with him. Quick as a wink, Francois's fair whip sang through the air to punish the culprit, which made Buck respected the half-breed spontaneously.

When he first landed the earth of the North, Buck experienced an unforgettable lesson—the law of fang. Curly, a friendly companion, was attacked by some wolfish creatures, extremely violent and wicked huskies. Unexpectedly, Buck was taken aback when Curly was buried with agony by a crowd of onlooking huskies. With a shudder of horror, he noticed Spitz “run out his scarlet tongue in a way he had of laughing” (ibid, p.14), at the same time he saw “Francois, swinging an axe, spring into the mess of dogs. Three men with clubs were helping him to scatter them” (ibid, p.15). Although Francois can't save Curly timely, he tried his best to stop the cruel crime regardless of his own safety and his dog's death made his blood boil instead of Spitz's indifference and cold-bloodedness.

At the Pelly one morning, a sled dog dolly gone mad suddenly and sprang straight for Buck, who had never seen a mad dog and out of horror fled away. Followed by Dolly, panting and frothing, Buck raced straight away in a panic. In desperation, he heard Francois' call to him and run back, "putting all his faith in that Francois would save him" (ibid, p.29), still Dolly leap behind. In the critical moments, Francois crashed down upon Dolly's head with an axe and saved Buck as Buck shot past him. At that time Buck was so exhausted and helpless that cunning Spitz grasped the very rare chance to spring upon Buck and bite him ferociously. It was Francois who saw the scene and angrily whip the despicable attacker with his fair lash.

Although Francois helped Buck frequently and he liked this clever and competent dog, he never spoiled Buck. After experiencing so many hardships, Buck wanted to be the lead dog and openly threatened Spitz's leadership. When some dogs made mistakes by chance and Spitz intended to punish them, Buck came between them deliberately and helped the "victim" he should have punished. And in those moments, "Francois, chuckling at the incident while unswerving in the administration of justice, brought his lash down upon Buck with all his might" (ibid, p.30). From the above, we can conclude Francois not only had an insight into dogs but he knew dogs' importance in the harsh environment because of without dogs, without sled team's future. Therefore, Francois must have the virtues of fairness and integrity to manage the different "workers" successfully and make the sled team run well.

2.2 Bravery—Gold Diggers' Life Skills

In London's diary he wrote, "In the crowded heated room discerned the fair bronzed skin and mustache of the ubiquitous adventurous Anglo-Saxon, always at home in any environment" (as cited in Johnston, 1984, p.47). He even believed that "the Indians who lived in Alaska could endure the hardship there less well than the white pioneers" (Sinclair, 1978, p.51). In his novel, the brave Anglo-Saxons were never sensitive or hesitating but to fight to the death in face of challenge. In *The Call of the Wild*, Perrault, the swarthy French-Canadian, was a strong proof.

When the sled team marched on, mostly Perrault conducted as a guide to go ahead of the team and to pack the snow with his shoes to make sure it's safer and easier for them. Through many years' living in the North, Perrault took great pride in his knowledge of snow and ice, "which knowledge was indispensable, for the fall ice was very thin, and where there was swift water, there was no ice at all" (London, 2009, p.19).

They faced many adventurous experiences all the way. After they crossed the White Pass or the Chilkoot Pass, the next obstacle they had to face on their way to the gold fields was "a series of treacherous rapids and gusty lakes" (Johnston, 2007, p.97). When Buck and the team have "a bleak and miserable camp" on Lake Laberge, where the

wind "cut like a white-hot knife." In such temperatures, "men's lungs froze if they even breathed improperly, through their mouths" (ibid, p.143). On one side of the lake was "a perpendicular wall of rock" (London, 2009, p.24). Here it was that the sled dogs were attacked by the ravenous huskies. Those hungry beasts ate nearly half of foods and the brave men and dogs fought against the enemies intensely to contest for the foods and defend their own lives....The Thirty Mile River was so dangerous for dog and man that they must run the risk of their lives to take every step carefully. But nothing daunted Perrault who was a veteran and full of courage:

A dozen times, Perrault, nosing the way, broke through the ice bridges....But a cold snap was on, the thermometer registering fifty below zero, and each time he broke through he was compelled for very life to build a fire and dry his garments. (ibid, p.40)

From the above words, we can see Perrault's courage as well as his adaptability. London believed that in the evolutionary scheme of things, certain laws have to be obeyed. "Man may be a higher animal, but his survival, like that of all animals, depends on his adaptability" (Lundquist, 1987, p.143). Those who survived were improved because of their adaptation to the Northland Code.

It is to Haskell that we turn for a description of the second, more famous pass, "the Chilkoot Pass from Dyea, Alaska" (Johnston, 2007, p.93). This is the pass over which Buck and sled team traveled to reach Dawson and the gold fields. Though not as long as White Pass, Chilkoot was extremely difficult. Claudia Durst Johnston depicted it detailedly in his book *Understanding The Call of the Wild*:

The lower part was narrow and strewn with immense boulders....The entire pass was ice and snow filled, and those who went over it were in constant danger of being crushed by falling rocks or buried by avalanches of snow. (ibid)

The Chilkoot was too steep for pack animals. At this moment, it was Perrault who solved this difficulty by a miracle. We saw his wisdom from *The Call of the Wild* that "with every thong and sled lashing and the last bit of harness rove into a long rope, the dogs were hoisted, one by one, to the cliff crest" (London, 2009, p.40). At last, Buck's never-ending labor is underscored by brave Perrault's desire to shatter records in their travels to Dawson in order to exchange information about gold fins that will benefit the Canadian government.

2.3 Mercy—Sympathy for the Sled Dogs

London believes that while we are under the control of "great unreasoning forces," these forces, through "merciless natural law," nonetheless "generated the altruistic in man," and that only the race with the highest degree of altruism will survive: "The lesser breeds cannot endure" (as cited in Lundquist, 1987, p.118). While in the harsh Northland, people must bear in mind that people

and animals are no difference, only the strong can survive, and most of the time people and dogs are comrade-in-arms who must help each other to strive for a slim chance of survival.

Back to our heroes, initially, the essentially fair and efficient government couriers Francois and Perrault, and later the "Scotch half-breed" in charge of the mail train, who along with the other drivers was also just. Despite harsh circumstances they respected the dogs and showed sympathy for their sufferings.

We know that Francois and Perrault, bearing important dispatches for the government, were anxious to choose the best dogs, therefore, they were especially satisfied with the outstanding Buck and regarded Buck with special respect: When Buck took good care of keeping the traces clear and mastered his work with ease, "Francois' whip snapped less frequently, and Perrault even honored Buck by lifting up his feet and carefully examining them" (London, 2009, p.18).

When the sled team was attacked by the huskies in a sudden, people and dogs fought back bravely, but at last sled dogs were seriously battered because they were completely outnumbered by the enemy. Their masters felt deeply mournful for their wounded soldiers and comforted them softly, "mebbe it make you mad dog, those many bites. Mebbe all mad dog, sacredam" (ibid, p.27)!

Although Perrault was a good pathfinder, once, the sled broke through, with Dave and Buck. When Francois and Perrault dragged them out with all their strength, they were half-frozen and appeared to be dying. To save them, their master made the fire immediately and kept them on the run, which picked up their lives.

Due to the hard work in the ice, Buck's feet were badly hurt and he had to limp in agony. When they had a rest, Buck lay down like a dead dog and didn't want to move to eat his ration of fish. Whenever this time, Francois brought the meal to him out of sympathy. And Perrault "rubbed Buck's feet for half an hour each night after supper, and sacrificed the tops of his own moccasins to make four moccasins for Buck" (ibid, p.28), because he didn't want to lose the outstanding companion. Through this painful and happy journey Buck had profound friendship with the two masters.

But there can be no question that "the lives of creatures, man included, are largely determined by forces beyond their control" (Johnston, 2007, p.20). A prime example is the disappearance of Buck's comparatively kind drivers, François and Perrault, from the scene. They leave, not because they make a conscious decision to make a change, but because official orders arrive directing their actions.

A Scotch half-breed, also having London's favorite brave and industrious ancestry, was in charge of Buck and his mates. Although each night the master looked after the dogs first: "They ate before the drivers ate, and no man sought his sleeping-robe till he had seen to the feet of

the dogs he drove" (London, 2009, p.43), they felt weak day by day. And a dog named Dave suffered most of all. Therefore, "the Scotch half-breed called a halt and took him out of the team, letting him run free behind the sled" (ibid). But Dave didn't want to leave the team. When knowing a dog could break its heart after being discarded by the sled team, "they held it a mercy and decided that Dave should die in the traces with content" (ibid, p.44). At last, Dave's strength left him and he couldn't catch up with the team. He mournfully howled till they passed out of his sight. Feeling sadly, "the Scotch half-breed retraced his steps to the camp and shot the adamant Dave with a revolver" (ibid, p.45).

There are other hints in *The Call of the Wild* that humans were not insensitive to cruelty to animals. A group gathers to watch Hal and company attempt with a whip to get exhausted dogs to pull an overloaded sled that is frozen to the ground. One of that group tells Hal and Charles that the dogs need a rest. Another is obviously furious about the whipping of the dogs. Then, one of the righteous onlookers spoke up: "It's not that I care a whoop what becomes of you, but for the dogs' sakes, I just want to tell you, you can help them a mighty lot by breaking out that sled" (ibid, p.50).

2.4 Brotherhood—John Thornton's Affection to Buck

In his book, *Gold Hunter, Bond* (1969) stated that he was struck even at the time with London's unique way of dealing with dogs. While others patted and caressed dogs, London "always spoke and acted toward a dog as if he recognized his noble qualities, respected them" (p.39). Therefore, London created John Thornton, an ideal hero, who was also a gold miner, having admirable heredity, good at outdoor lives, and performed remarkably in the subsequent adventures, and above all he had not lost his moral nature and treated dogs as brothers.

When he was sold to the incompetent family party, Charles, Mercedes and Hal, Buck and the other dogs were further victimized. Inexperienced and stubborn, the three ignore the advice from experienced Klondike men and beat the dogs ruthlessly. Hal even assumed that the dogs' inability to pull the sled indicates that "you've got to whip them to get anything out of them. That's their way" (London, 2009, p.50). However, by chance, they met John Thornton, who immediately refuted this conclusion and noted that the dogs' unrelenting labor, heavy load, and systematic starving were the reasons behind their refusal to work.

When Buck refused to stand up and took on the loads, Hal cruelly whipped him again and again with the lash. "A moisture came into Thornton's eyes" (ibid, p.58), but he couldn't make his mind because Buck belonged to others. Thornton's goodness gave Buck a slim of hope. Although he had learned long ago that it was useless to fight a man with a club in his hand, but at John Thornton's camp Buck decided that even a clubbing will not get him on his feet.

"The spark of life within Buck flickered and went down. It was nearly out" (ibid). Then suddenly, Thornton sprang upon the man who wielded the club and cried with rage, "If you strike that dog again, I'll kill you" (ibid, p.59)! So we can see the only protection of animals, so brutally misused in the Yukon, came in the form of risky individual intervention. John Thornton intervened on Buck's behalf by disarming Hal and cutting Buck from the traces. Buck was also reborn in love, revived by John Thornton after being nearly starved, beaten and worked to death by the three incompetents. Love, though it did not last forever, became the redeeming force, powerful enough to resurrect the dead.

In Buck's eyes, John Thornton was an ideal master, who "saw to the welfare of his dogs as if they were his won children, because he could not help it" (ibid, p.63). Many moments supported this romantic depiction of Thornton, such as his rescue of Buck from the abusive neophytes, his uncanny rapport with and momentary "taming" of Buck, and his insistence on rest for his dogs:

Thornton has another two dogs, kind and friendly to Buck. They had no jealousy to Buck and "seemed to share the kindness and largeness of John Thornton" (ibid, p.62). As Buck became healthy they invited him to take part in some interesting games, "in which Thornton himself could not forbear to join" (ibid, p.63). Thornton had a special way of expressing love to Buck: He "took Buck's head roughly between his hands, and resting his own head upon Buck's, of shaking him back and forth" (ibid), at the same time called him ill names. Often they would gaze with each other, without speech, "Thornton's heart shining out of his eyes as Buck's heart shone out" (ibid, p.64)....And when Buck won the bet by dragging a sled of one thousand pounds, which made Thornton shed tears in excitement, a shameless dog dealer wanted to buy him with a big money. Thornton cried, "no, sir. You can go to hell, sir. It's the best I can do for you, sir" (ibid, p.73). All of this can fully illustrate Thornton's genuine passionate love to Buck.

CONCLUSION

Norris suggested that naturalism was an appropriate literary form to exploring the unplumbed depths of the human heart, the problems of life, and the black, unsearched penetralia of the soul of man. London just practically applied the serious and understated literary form to reveal the complicated human nature, good or evil, for us. He advocated action, attached importance to the collision of personality in severe environment, and depicted the essence of life. At the same time, his works didn't flow at preaching. Instead, he vividly dramatized the philosophy. Ode to the American dream and the vanished loss mingled in his works. He praised the

powerful heroes and lamented the powerless individuals in fatalism opinion. He spoke highly of the survival of the fittest even beyond the morality and also petitioned for the weak from the bottom of the society.

At the end of the story, from civilization to wilderness, from a tamed dog to a wild wolf, Buck's change has different interpretation when discussed from different points of view. On one hand, despite the savagery that he acknowledges there, Buck's return to the wild is London's decision to align himself with the Party of Nature. On the other hand, it can be the author's disappointment to human civilization and his pessimistic fatalism of "born evil", and it also can be the author's breaking free to nature and the longing for freedom and beautiful human nature. London's love-hate ambivalence about the humanity reveals people's mental dilemma in this material-life-flourishing society, indicating his pursuing for a sound and vigorous life by returning to the wild.

REFERENCES

- Bond, M., Jr. (1969). *Gold hunter*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Etulain, R. W, ed. (1979). *Jack London on the road: The tramp diary and other hobo writings*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press.
- James, L. (1987). *Jack London adventures, ideas, and fiction*. New York: The Ungar Publishing Company.
- Johnston, C. (1984). *Jack London—An American radical*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Johnston, C. D. (2007). *Understanding The Call of the Wild: A student casebook to issues, sources, and historical documents*. Beijing: China Renmin University Press.
- Labor, Earle, & Reesman, J. C. (1994). *Jack London, revised edition*. New York: Twayne Publishers.
- London, J. (1964). What life means to me. *Jack London American Rebel* (pp.392-399). New York: The Citadel Press.
- London, J. (2009). *The Call of the Wild/ White Fang*. Beijing: Tsinghua University Press.
- Rossetti, G. M. (2006). *Imagining the primitive in naturalist and modernist literature*. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press.
- Sinclair, A. (1978). *Jack: A biography of Jack London*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Tavernier-Courbin, J. (1995). *The Call of the Wild and The Jungle: Jack London's and Upton Sinclair's animal and human jungles. The Cambridge companion to American realism and naturalism: Howells to London* (pp.236-249). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.